# Grace

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/3750859.

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| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | Underage |
| Category: | M/M |
| Fandoms: | Hannibal (TV), King Arthur (2004) |
| Relationship: | Galahad/Tristan (Arthurian) |
| Characters: | Galahad (Arthurian), Tristan (Arthurian), Lancelot (King Arthur) |
| Additional Tags: | First Kiss, Renaissance Era, Longing, Dreams, fears, Promises, Fluff, adoration, To Be Continued |
| Language: | English |
| Series: | Part 3 of Stories Around the Fire: The Tristhad Vignettes |
| Stats: | Published: 2015-04-15 Words: 4,447 Chapters: 1/1 |

# Grace

by drinkbloodlikewine, whiskeyandspite

Summary

*“There you are.”*

*Though the knight speaks softly, his voice carries in the silence. Galahad imagines that he does not care, his disregard for protocol known and made respected still through his actions. The man rarely attends services but when they’re required of him, and though with patience he bears it, he seems little invested in the proceedings.*

*Galahad has wondered, often, whether the man truly holds faith in God at all, or whether he belongs entirely to worldliness instead. He bows his head deeper and does not answer.*

Based in the Renaissance era, the more common interpretation of the King Arthur legend. For Tristhad Week on Tumblr.

Notes

Ho boy! This was a fun one for us, in that it took but a sentence to get into writing it and several hours to finish it, and moments after that to realize we wanted more. So more will come, we assure you. For now, please be patient with us.

Check out the notes at the bottom for lovely pretty things.

A huge huge HUGE thank you to noodletheelephant, our brilliant beta. We love you bb, you are wonderful!

See the end of the work for more notes

He knows only that his knees ache, and that he deserves it. The stone beneath him is smooth, worn into gentle divots from hundreds and thousands of people kneeling and walking and praying here. It is almost as though he sits on sand dunes, and wonders, for a moment, what was here before the chapel was, if perhaps the history of this place is crawling up from beneath the ground, the way plants break through the cracks in a wall, determined to live and patient enough to try.

He does not know how long he has waited here. He knows that he has missed the morning meal, has missed his morning chores. He had come here to pray and then had not left when the others had, ready to care for their knights' horses and shine their saddles.

Galahad should be there. He should be because it is right that he is here, his father had insisted upon his apprenticeship early, and the knight Galahad squires for is true, fair, part of the round table of King Arthur himself.

Perhaps that is why he's here, why he is watching shadows pass over the soft rises and falls in the stone, hands clasped gently over his knees, head down. Perhaps that is why he has to purge his thoughts, make them once more clean, before he returns to helping him, serving him. Thoughts lead to deeds, and Galahad finds his cheeks warming at the very thought of what he had dreamed and seen, and his heart filling with dread with what had taken to get there.

It is a strange longing, and one Galahad accepts as a trial on his way to God's path for him.

The heavy door is pulled open, hinges groaning the effort, and without knowing how, without knowing why, Galahad recognizes the footfalls. Gentle enough to barely be heard, steady and graceful, and carrying with them the man Galahad had seen behind closed eyes that night. He smiles, he cannot not. And then frowns immediately to hide his pleasure in the presence.

"There you are."

Though the knight speaks softly, his voice carries in the silence. Galahad imagines that he does not care, his disregard for protocol known and made respected still through his actions. The man rarely attends services but when they're required of him, and though with patience he bears it, he seems little invested in the proceedings.

Galahad has wondered, often, whether the man truly holds faith in God at all, or whether he belongs entirely to worldliness instead. He bows his head deeper and does not answer.

The whisper of his boots steps closer, near enough behind the young man that Galahad spites his heart for quickening.

"Are you unwell?" Tristan asks.

Perhaps he is, perhaps that is what ails his mind and brings such thoughts and feelings to the forefront. Purity, his father had told him, purity would get him into God's graces, would set him on God's tasks. He tries not to think of what would happen should his thoughts be made

vocal, he fears even confession of such a thing would rain fire upon his head and a lash across his back.

“I am praying,” Galahad replies softly. He shifts just a little to adjust his position, wincing at the pain that shoots up his side at the motion, the way his knees throb.

“You have prayed all morning,” Tristan tells him gently, but there is no rebuke, there. Galahad knows that although the man himself will not speak to God by choice, he will never stop another from taking his time in His presence. Galahad nods just once, and feels himself flush as Tristan walks around him, quiet steps still, and settles into a graceful crouch at his side.

Galahad’s hair falls wispy just over his eyes, but if he lifts them, if he turns his head just so, he can see the pale scars on Tristan’s cheek, parallel, like scratches from a cat, marks a cruel instructor once gave him for a lesson poorly learned. Galahad had always been fascinated by them, the way they shift and shrug as Tristan smiles.

He looks, now, and wonders if perhaps his confession should be made to the man he had wronged, in his head when he rested. He closes his eyes and takes a breath, fingers curling in his lap.

“I had a dream,” he starts.

And stops. Breath sighed out wordless after.

A low sound hums pensive from the knight. Though Tristan is seemingly aware of his disruption, he disregards it, and slowly he settles back to sit cross-legged beside him.

“One would think, if you are expected to kneel for so long, that they would make the floors of something softer.”

He doesn’t understand - godless as he is - that prayer is not meant to be a thing of comfort, and Galahad snorts softly. Prayer is the seeking of comfort, in a place kept from the wilds of the world and the yielding earth and all the things that grow from it. In suffering, one seeks penance. In pain, forgiveness.

And then, perhaps, comfort - when it has been earned.

“Dreams are both of great value and none at all,” Tristan says softly. “As easily heeded as dismissed, and so the bearer can decide with what worth to weigh them, depending on their nature.” From beneath the lank hair, braided in long strands alongside his face, Tristan finally turns his gaze from the cross to the man, and asks, “Of what did you dream that’s had you here half the day? Let me help you dismiss it so your knees might mend.”

Another little nervous laugh and Galahad shakes his head.

It must be so easy for him, to assume confession can be made to anyone willing to listen, that absolution could be given by anyone with a good heart. And Galahad wonders, for a moment,

if perhaps it really is that simple. If he really can confess his thoughts, all their horrid implications, to the man beside him and be absolved.

He raises his eyes to the cross before him and swallows. In his lap, his fingers twist and bend together, one nail gently picking at another. Clean hands, smooth hands. Slowly learning how to work and how to sew and clean and cook and fight. He is no man yet. Perhaps he should admit his wrongs, now, when the worst that he will get is the lash. Parallel pale scars of his own to wear, from a teacher driving home a message.

Galahad parts his lips with the tip of his tongue.

“I dreamed of you,” he says finally, words so soft they barely register, but he knows Tristan hears him. He can feel his cheeks red with humiliation but he continues to speak, having started. “I dreamed that on the battlefield, only I could save you.”

Whatever Tristan expected to hear that would drive the boy so desperately seeking his salvation, it doesn’t seem to be this. His brows lift, considering, and he sweeps his gaze away as if to afford Galahad some semblance of privacy. It will do little good with the words already spoken, others weighing down his tongue and pressing against the gates of his teeth. No comfort has come to him in his day at prayer. Perhaps instead a proper penance will relieve him of his guilt.

“And did you save me?” Tristan asks, so gentle in tone that Galahad looks towards him, as if to seek out the mockery that must lie beneath. He sees only the man, drawing up his legs and settling his heels to the stone, elbows stretched over his knees.

Galahad forces his eyes to stay on the knight beside him. His mentor, in truth, his friend. Though he is much closer to Galahad’s father, Tristan has never seemed at all to treat the boy in the way Lancelot does. He does not chasten him for every mistake, he does not push him to better himself for a holy spirit, merely for himself. Tristan is the one who flicks water at him as he passes from the well, just to watch Galahad’s eyes widen and his smile peek from beneath his long-honed seriousness.

He could tell him.

He should.

Galahad swallows. and nods. “I did save you,” he says, bright wide eyes seeking between Tristan’s. “Together on the field I gave you life and soothed your bleeding. I -” Galahad’s fingers gather in his tunic until his knuckles turn white. “I kissed you, and you lived.”

A blink, out of time, is the only immediate reaction Galahad can see cross Tristan’s stoic features. The warmth is there. The familiarity is there. But a moment is taken for the knight to gather himself, and shift his gentle surprise to a cautious amusement.

“Was I dead?”

“You were. Until -”

“A miracle,” Tristan says, appraising his squire beside him. “I owe you a debt, then, for saving my life.”

Galahad holds his breath in a sudden swell of displeasure. Must he be so calm? Must he be so infuriatingly patient? This is not the forgiveness that Galahad has spent the morning seeking. This is not the mortification of his mind sought through exhausting his body, to purge his thoughts until they are pure again.

“It is not a miracle,” he declares in a whisper. “It is a sin.”

“To kiss?”

“To kiss a man,” Galahad clarifies, and his eyes close briefly as he forces himself not to turn to the cross again and murmur a prayer in apology.

Tristan says nothing for a moment, considers still the boy beside him, who sits as though he expects punishment to fall upon him here, as though he expects Tristan to be the one to issue it without thought or pity. He has been a long time in this land, but it is foreign to him still, some customs and beliefs entirely illogical to him, though he would never say so to his friends and brothers.

They worship as they want to, he lives as he chooses. Side by side in battle, he would trust no others, and they the same.

What does it matter?

“What I know of the holy teachings, the words you say and songs you sing,” he starts, carefully, “it seems that sin is placed on life itself. You come to life a sinner, you leave it one as well.”

“We can only pray for guidance,” Galahad tells him softly, but he watches Tristan with a hope that he will say something, now, do something, now, to make the terror in his bones fade with a breath.

“Sin creates life, Galahad. We are born with it and from it. You gave me life with another sin, in your dream. But is not that gift more important than the word that weighs against its balm? I would see the dream as a testament to your humanity, and your empathy, and kindness. I would not see it as a dream of sin and evil.”

Galahad’s brows knit, as worry creases lines across. He sits with the words, considers their meaning and the intent behind them, and knows Tristan means no harm, but -

“You justify sin,” he whispers, as though to keep his voice from God Himself.

“I give more weight to life than what comes after it,” Tristan answers, dark eyes drifting across the young man’s stricken features, pale and blushing all at once. “Is killing a sin?”

“It is. Of course it is.”

“And yet you train for it. You dress me to do so. Why, if it is burdensome to your spirit, would you allow it?”

“Because the ones you kill are Godless,” Galahad answers quickly, fingers fisted in his tunic.

“Not in their minds,” shrugs Tristan. “What would happen if I did not fight? If I stood on the battlefield and prayed.”

*God would protect you*, Galahad wants to say. He wants to believe it true, that God is so mighty as that, and that he would have mercy on a good man, even one as heathen as Tristan. He shakes his head, and instead speaks truth. “You would be killed.”

“So we sin to save our lives, and our way of life. And murder seems a far more grievous thing than kissing.”

Galahad watches him with wide eyes and lips barely parted. He had never considered such a stand before, that something they work for, strive and train for, is just as sinful as something as soft as a kiss. It suddenly seems so silly, his worries and woes. He feels his cheeks flush for a much different reason.

The little squire looks away, looks down at his hands and shifts just a little to no longer be kneeling, a small sound of pain as blood returns, numbing, to his legs and feet as he settles on his thigh instead.

“If you wish to stay and pray,” Tristan tells him, just watching the boy shift and make himself more comfortable, “I will leave you to your peace.” A smile, then, small but playful in the way he always is with the boy. When he brings them both a sweet bun from the knight’s table to share, when he found the little falcon chick that Galahad helped him raise into the scouting bird she is today. "But I am eternally indebted to you, for saving my life."

Galahad smiles, despite himself, perhaps with a strange sort of pride where he had hours before felt only shame.

"I wish -" The boy bites his lip, furrows his brow and considers carefully his next words. "I wish you had not suffered, even in my mind, for something so little." *I would bestow kisses on you daily, if it meant you would not die in battle*

A hand sets to his hair, unexpected warmth, and the knight that he serves coils his fingers through soft locks, stroking. It sends shivers down Galahad's spine, and more cascade like rising rain when Tristan rubs a thumb over the tension in his neck to ease it into gentle laxity.

"Was it suffering?" Tristan laughs. "To fight and die for one's beliefs, for the homeland they protect? And be rewarded by a kiss at the end. I think that's every knight's dearest wish."

"It would ruin me," insists his squire. "The prophecy -"

"What did it say?"

"That only he whose purity remains may seek the Grail," Galahad whispers. "That chastity intact, having never known the touch of a maiden -"

"Am I a maiden?" Tristan laughs, casting a look down the length of his own body, made strong and scarred by ceaseless skirmish. "Your God knows things that I do not, if my touch alone would rend you so."

Galahad tightens beneath his knight's touch. "The prophecy spoke of purity -"

"And is restoration of a life not that entirely? A kindness the likes of which might never be repaid, an act of goodness and charity brought to light by a tender heart," Tristan says. He lets his hand slip free of boyish curls and instead prods a firm finger against Galahad's chest. "There is your purity, squire, and no man or maid can take it."

Galahad thinks of the first time his father had introduced him to Tristan. He remembers how nervous he had been, the man standing almost savage among his brothers. Unruly hair and foreign armor, a smile entirely in his eyes and rarely his mouth. He had captivated the boy entirely. Galahad thinks of how he had both feared and delighted in the way his heart had hammered in his chest.

He has learned so much from him. In the art of battle and compassion, of nature and tracking, of horsemanship and scouting. He has learned of bravery and humor, has found himself laughing more with his knight than any boys who share his quarters with him. He thinks of purity of heart, and how he knows no man better than Tristan who embodies that.

He thinks of his dream.

He watches Tristan beside him, hand up to press to his heart where Tristan had tapped, and wonders if bravery comes from words, bolstered and true, or from within himself, as his initial confession had come before.

"Some say love is the highest purity," Galahad murmurs. "To be able to give your heart so wholly to another, and be trusted with theirs."

Tristan makes a thoughtful sound, and Galahad wonders if the man thinks him wise or naive, brave or foolish. Nothing in the knight’s face shows misgiving, no coldness or mockery, but only the warmth of a well-tended hearthfire.

“I am less a man of the faith - this faith - than you,” Tristan says after a moment. “But it seems cruel that a God would gift us with the ability to give ourselves in that way to another, and then punish us for acting on it. It is a kinder thing to consider that perhaps we are meant to embody the love that He shows us from so far away, in means more tangible to our mortal forms. Otherwise, it would be akin to mounting a horse, but never spurring it to movement. What point is there in that?”

He shakes his head, his smile faint, gathering just in the wrinkles beside his eyes, above scars and pagan ink striped across his high-risen cheeks.

“It matters not to me at any rate,” he adds. “You are a thoughtful boy, pure despite your doubts and with resounding compassion in your heart. I do not think the affections of a maid would sully that.”

The knight lets his hand slip from Galahad's neck, and sets both to his own knees instead, making as though to stand.

"Take the day, if you need, to do what you feel you must. But know that I expect nothing more of you than to be true to what moves you, in whatever way."

Galahad's breathing stutters, and he presses his lips together to stop a small sound escaping him at the words. He does not want to ask if the affections of a man would sully him. He does not want to ask if there are affections, at all, beyond his own one-sided pining for the knight beside him. He does not ask because he fears the answers, as he does not fear the man.

*Be true to whatever moves you.*

Galahad swallows and does not let the knight push himself to standing, a small hand down against his wrist to stop him, as he leans in to press his lips to the corner of Tristan's mouth, just a fluttering and little thing, his cheeks bright from the courage it had taken to do even that. And he had thought, many times and many nights, about how it would feel to show his love this way, he had thought of how it would feel to have his feelings returned.

He had thought and he had feared, a cold dread and sickness in his throat that persistently would not go away. He finds he feels neither, now, as he pulls back with a small shivering breath, and without raising his eyes, turns the knight just enough for the next kiss to be properly against his lips.

Tristan's breath holds still, the same pause of every movement inside or outside his body when he's hunting, when he's scouting. A situation unfamiliar to him that requires a concentrated silence, before the knight lifts a hand to his squire's brow as if to ease him away. He tangles calloused fingers in Galahad's curls, but before Galahad's heart has time to sink at being stopped, Tristan leans in to touch another kiss to trembling lips.

It is wrong, cries the voice in the back of Galahad's mind, to kiss his father's brother-in-arms, to kiss a man, to kiss within a church or to kiss at all. But as Tristan's mouth spreads softly against his own, reverent and slow, the rising heat of his body burns the guilt away. There must be sweetness in sin, or no one would contest with it - there must be reason that men slip from grace and have to reclaim their place within it, and as Galahad's heart flaps like a trapped bird against the cage of his ribs, it all becomes so suddenly clear.

Broad hand framing soft, unfurred cheek, Tristan leans back, rather than forward, just enough to coax Galahad closer to him. He presses uncertain hands to the knight's chest, fisting his fingers in the rough weave of his shirt. He presses their mouths unsteady together, noses bumping, breath a rushed whisper against the other's cheek.

If he had imagined how this would feel, ever, this is something entirely other. It is like breathing, Galahad wonders if he has ever felt so light, and if anything had ever felt so perfectly right to do, more than this. He shivers at the feeling of Tristan's hands against him, in affection, here, rather than gentle reassurance or playful teasing. He brings one hand up to touch Tristan's face as well, and closes his eyes before moving closer for another kiss, desperate for them now as a drowning man is for air.

Tristan sits further back, one leg out to balance himself, as he had taught Galahad to do when they wrestled together. *It is rarely strength, Galahad, it is all about balance. Use your enemy's strength against himself, do not expend your own.* He does not pull Galahad closer so much as the boy moves closer entirely on his own, puppy-small in Tristan's hands that settle wide against his side, in his hair to hold him gently where he is.

Galahad feels safe. He feels wanted. He does not feel himself shatter, as he had thought once he would, from doing something like this. Nor does holy fire consume him for desecrating a place such as this, with a kiss. He laughs, a gentle little noise, and swallows any words he might say, curling his lip between his teeth instead, just resting against Tristan as they are.

"And still untarnished by any devious maidens," Tristan observes, in good-natured amusement. "I think I will live forever now that you have kissed me so many times."

Galahad settles, sprawled over the knight, and seeks to give another gift of grace. Tristan's mouth parts for him, to let the squire kiss his bottom lip, his upper, the corner of his mouth, and then across them all. His unshaven scruff rubs soft against the younger man's skin, the thick curls on his chest heated warm beneath Galahad's seeking fingers. Slowly, Tristan widens the kiss between them, and rumbles as open heat is shared in sacred space between their mouths, salvation in their sighs, consecration in the touch of their tongues.

Galahad hates himself for whimpering, but the sensation spreads shivers down his spine and nearly fells him on top of the knight entirely. Cheeks red and eyes closed tight as he parts his lips and shivers breath between them. His entire body has come alive with this, lightning and heat and the endless hammering of his heart.

He hopes his own faith is true. That his silly kisses will keep the man safe, even in sweet memory, from harm. He wishes for little else.

Carefully, Galahad seeks with his tongue, a sound like a hum, a laugh, at the surprise of how good this feels, how entirely unusual, how truly welcome. He's trembling, he can feel it in the way his hands clasp so hard against Tristan, the way the other soothes down his back to calm him as though he is a foal too scared to run from the rope and just as scared to be snared by it.

Without realizing they've slipped so far, Galahad feels stone beneath his fingers when his hands place to either side of Tristan's head. The knight lays back beneath him, as if subservient to his squire's want rather than how it should be. Galahad thrills at it, heart racing as their mouths drive together with all the speeding rhythm of the horses they ride, of the clatter of armor, again and again until his sides are heaving heavy and Tristan snares him gently by the hair, just enough to pull him back, and nuzzle against a flushed cheek.

"Slow," the knight tells him, dark eyes searching between bright blue. "Slow. You have me now," he says, letting his head rest back against the church stones, as sunlight scatters from the bronze cross above to spill stars over both.

Tristan is beautiful, and Galahad brings a trembling hand to touch his knight's lips. He, too, perhaps is beautiful, from the way that Tristan looks at him with unconditional tenderness. They swore to each other once, years before, to serve as squire and knight, to provide and

teach each in turn. And when that oath was made, was it not sacred? Did God Himself not bless them for their promise?

And does not, now, the meeting of their lips bring their words to sweet fruition?

He slows, though, as Tristan asks of him, gentle lips and soft nuzzles, eyes still closed and body slowly relaxing when Tristan strokes his hair and over his face, thumbs soft over his eyelids as Galahad closes his eyes and rests their foreheads together.

*You have me now.*

Galahad smiles, grins, expression overjoyed, cheeks flushed and entirely contented as he has not been in a long time - too much in fear of his own dreams to allow himself rest, should he see visions once more. Of battlefields and blood and death. Of lips meeting lips.

Of this.

“I vow to rescue you my whole life,” Galahad laughs gently.

Tristan meets his laugh, a single note sighed in earnest pleasure, before he catches Galahad’s mouth beneath his own, a fiercer thing than what his squire has gifted him in fleeting touches, sweet and clumsy. Tongues brush teeth and lips spread wide, bodies arching together in response to the other’s weight, hearts beating hard through ribs and skin.

“I hope that you need not,” Tristan mutters when they break for breath. A crooked grin appears before the knight lets his eyes slip closed and his head rest once more against unyielding stone made warm by midday sun. “But that if you must, it is like this. One could not want for a sweeter angel to grant them grace than you.”

They lay together in the empty church, filled with life by the fondness expressed between them. Whether they leave this place as knight and squire, or something more entirely, will be proven in time.

End Notes

"Galahad is "fighting an internal battle between the ideal and the human", believing that he is like God and that he is able to be a "savior capable of imparting grace", following a dream in which he saves a dying knight with a kiss." [x]

Now tell us, how could we NOT play with this? :D

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